Chief Administrative Officer Survey 2004

Report of Proceedings
Follow-up Focus Groups

June and October 2005

Alberta
Municipal Affairs

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BACKGROUND

Alberta Municipal Affairs engaged Ipsos-Reid to conduct a survey with the chief administrative officers (CAOs) of all Alberta municipalities in February 2004. The survey focused on CAO employment, education and training, municipal planning and priorities, CAO responsibilities, succession planning, and Ministry programs and services.

Before completing the design of the 2004 CAO survey, the Ministry sought input from municipal administrators through focus group workshops on current issues and trends, education and training, information needs, relationships, grants and general survey advice. After the 2004 CAO survey was launched in January 2004, six additional workshops were held among Alberta CAOs. The focus of these workshops was on current issues and trends, the Municipal Internship Program, and succession planning.

The results of the survey and the focus groups are available on the Ministry website at http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ms/04MunAdminSurveys.cfm.

The Ministry wanted to continue the dialogue with municipal CAOs and to delve deeper into the results of the 2004 survey and focus group results. Three sessions were held in Innisfail, Grande Prairie, and Fort Saskatchewan in June 2005, which involved 36 CAOs. In October 2005, an additional session was held in Lethbridge.

The village CAOs were concerned that their issues, views and concerns were being overwhelmed in the larger focus groups; so, the Ministry held two additional focus group sessions specifically for villages in Vulcan on October 19, 2005 and in Nisku on October 26, 2005.

The purpose of these six focus group sessions was to:

- present some of the highlights of the 2004 CAO Survey,
- discuss the issues raised in the survey,
- provide the CAOs with the opportunity to give the Ministry their thoughts, ideas and suggestions about how the Ministry could collaborate with municipalities to build better relationships, programs and services, and
- find out how best to improve the dialogue between the Ministry and municipalities.

The sessions were organized to: present the highlights to the entire group, break into smaller working groups to discuss specific topics, have the working groups report back to the whole group, and finally hold a wrap-up discussion with the whole group. The working groups focused on four themes:

- succession planning,
- training,
- intermunicipal relations, and
- the role of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Ministry staff were present to facilitate, listen and capture the main points of the discussions. This report provides both a summary of all the sessions and provides an individual report on each of the six sessions.

SUMMARY

The CAOs appreciated and supported this type of collaborative meeting held by Municipal Affairs to discuss current issues. They also enjoyed the opportunity to come together and discuss issues of mutual concern. The discussions were open and the CAOs were forthcoming with their views and opinions. A summary of the major points they raised in the discussions is included, organized by each major topic.

Those issues that were felt to be uniquely representative of the villages have been reported separately at the end of this summary under the heading *Village Issues*.

Municipal Affairs Role

Advisory

The CAOs said they view the Ministry's response to issues as being reactive, rather than working to resolve issues. More should be done to build better relationships with and amongst municipalities, and encouraging cooperation rather than competition. Suggestions for improvement included:

- reinstating the municipal inspection program and corporate reviews,
- having advisors visit municipalities,
- establishing regional contacts within the Ministry, and
- locating staff in rural areas.

The CAOs stated that the Municipal Advisory Services Unit (MAS) provides good advice and they appreciate the recent efforts the Ministry has made to be more in touch with the CAOs and their issues. The CAOs gave their support for MAS to expand the new CAO orientation program and combine it with regular follow-up visits.

While CAOs recognized that the Ministry has a regulatory role, they believed that the Ministry should accomplish its objectives through facilitation, encouragement, and support rather than mandating rules.

Advocacy

The CAOs said they see the Minister of Municipal Affairs as "their Minister" and expect him to represent municipal views and positions to other government departments, at caucus, and to all members of the legislative assembly (MLAs). They would like to see the Ministry identify the impacts of legislative or regulatory changes on municipalities and advise other Ministers about these impacts. The CAOs also want the Ministry to advise them of the position the Ministry will take on municipal issues. This theme also includes senior Ministry staff representing the interests of municipalities with senior staff in other departments.

The municipal associations [the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMD&C)] are seen as lobby groups to put forth municipal views in a centralized, coordinated fashion.

Communication

The CAOs would like the Ministry to develop a more effective communication system between themselves and all departments of the Alberta government. They would also like the Ministry to be the clearing house or distribution point for most of the communications coming from the province.

They are also looking to establish better working relationships with Ministry staff through activities such as regular regional workshops, site visits, and meetings with the Deputy Minister and other senior officials.

Electronic messaging is an effective method of communicating with municipalities and they would like to see reference material available online, such as the Municipal Resource Handbook.

The CAOs say they would like to have similar types of meetings held with them at least annually and to have Ministry staff report back on the results of these focus groups. The meetings could also be used for Ministry staff to report on recent Ministry activities.

Intermunicipal Relations

The majority of CAOs believe that the Ministry should assist, support and facilitate the development of better municipal relationships. However, the CAOs recognize that the primary responsibility for improving relationships lies with the municipalities themselves. A CAO illustrated this point with the comment, "The province and the Ministry need to model good intermunicipal relations versus continuing the parent/child attitude."

Most CAOs believe that the abolishment of the regional planning commissions created conflict between urban and rural municipalities. Competition for scarce resources and resource sharing are also sources of conflict. Suggested actions include the province articulating its vision for the rural/urban interface, researching development scenarios over the next 15 years, and assisting in resolving revenue-sharing disputes. The Ministry should also assist with early intervention when political problems surface.

Succession Planning

The Ministry should look at the municipal sector as a whole to address the issue of succession planning. It may sometimes be difficult for individual municipalities to resolve their own issues. Suggestions include:

- establishing a provincial task force to address the issue,
- defining what succession planning means and involves,
- developing a method to utilize the knowledge, expertise, and talents of retiring CAOs,
- expanding the Municipal Internship Program both in numbers and length of the program,
- developing a municipal apprenticeship program, and
- working with education institutions to address the labour shortages.

The CAOs believe that politicians at both the provincial and municipal levels have created a negative perception of public service over the last ten years. This negative perception will have to be overcome before the public service will again become a career of choice. Some suggestions for consideration included joint programs between the Ministry and the CAOs to raise the profile of the public service, the development of materials for CAOs to use at career fairs and school presentations, and programs to educate elected officials about the value and cost of professional and well-trained staff.

The CAOs are aware of the need to plan for staff retirement since the function of government must continue under all circumstances. They believe the future may involve the sharing of staff and resources between municipalities, and different ways of doing business and delivering services.

Training

There was consensus that training for elected officials should be provided throughout their term, not just at the onset of their term of office. Suggested topics include roles and responsibilities, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and leadership training (specifically for mayors and reeves). The CAOs emphasized the need to have more education, training and workshops for elected officials to help improve intermunicipal and interpersonal relationships.

The CAOs would like training on practical day-to-day tasks including bylaws, policies, minutes, and the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA). They cautioned that a "one size fits all" approach does not work.

The cost of attending workshops is an issue for smaller municipalities. Suggestions for improvement include regional training delivery and workshops, and holding sessions immediately before or after the municipal associations' conventions.

The CAOs noted a need to educate and convince their councils about the value of training for both themselves and administration, and to budget the appropriate amount of funding for training.

The CAOs indicate that training is required in the critical areas of planning and assessment and for water treatment plant operators and middle management.

Other Issues/Comments

- The constant rotation of Deputy Ministers makes it difficult for municipalities to develop a working relationship with the Deputy Minister. The CAOs express a need to build strong, lasting relationships with the Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers.
- The Municipal Sponsorship Program requirements are too onerous and bureaucratic.
- The cost of technology is an issue for smaller municipalities, specifically the hook-up and monthly fees for SuperNet and the cost to join AUMA's Munishare.
- The CAOs suggest their preference for the province to remove the education portion from the property tax rather than provide grants, such as the infrastructure grants. The CAOs believe that one-time grants create dependency.

- The Ministry should consider maintaining a pool of expertise in areas of finance, public works, and planning that municipalities could draw on temporarily when they become short-staffed.

Village Issues

Village CAOs viewed their issues and solutions as being different from the other types of local governments. They appreciate the opportunity to meet and discuss their issues with other village CAOs in a safe, non-threatening environment. They noted a desire and need for a forum, perhaps sponsored and facilitated by the Ministry, where the village CAOs can discuss their issues.

The major issues restricting the ability of village CAOs with succession planning and training are lack of staff and available funds. In many cases, the village CAO is the only person in the office and council will not allow the office to be closed so the CAO can attend a course or seminar. Similarly, lack of funding restricts the CAOs' attendance at seminars that are either costly or require an overnight trip.

The issue of the shortage of staff time and funding was raised a number of times. For example, when asked about their opinion on long-range planning, many CAOs said it held little value or priority for them because their resources would only allow them to meet day-to-day obligations. The majority of CAOs said they are not using the SuperNet because the cost ($250 per month) is more than the village can afford.

The village CAOs recognize that the inspections and corporate reviews were excellent tools, providing assurance that the CAOs were doing their jobs properly and reinforcing that view with their councils.

The villages want "topic specific" one-day seminars, located in their regions that can provide them with practical training on a variety of subjects.

The CAOs would like reference material that is available online and continually updated including:

- a "Coles Notes" version of the MGA,
- names and contact information for the Ministry staff,
- templates of bylaws and development agreements,
- a calendar of upcoming deadlines and tasks, and
- accounting and finance.

The CAOs would like the Ministry to be a "one window/one-stop shop" for information from all government departments. They don't have time to deal with each department individually.

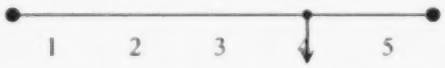
On current funding programs, they expressed the following viewpoints:

- The Municipal Sponsorship Program is too cumbersome, time consuming, and has too much uncertainty for the amount of funding provided.
- The Alberta Municipal Infrastructure Program is useful, but is not sufficient to fix their infrastructure. One village used its total grant allotment to repave two blocks at a cost of $475,000.

APPENDIX

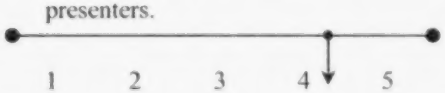
APPENDIX A: EVALUATION – ALL SESSIONS

1. **MATERIAL:** The usefulness and quality of the information communicated during the session regarding the CAO survey results.



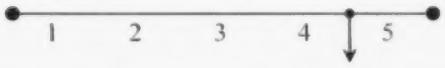
Mean Average: 4.14

2. **DELIVERY:** How well the session was organized, presented and facilitated by the presenters.



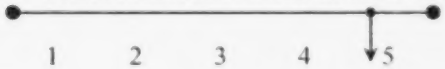
Mean Average: 4.34

3. **QUESTIONS:** The relevance of the questions considered by the participants during the session.



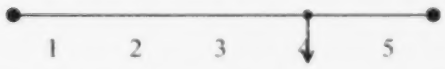
Mean Average: 4.44

4. **PARTICIPATION:** The extent to which the stakeholders participated in the session.



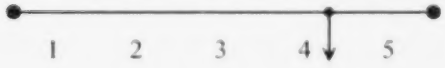
Mean Average: 4.81

5. **AMENITIES:** The quality of the meeting room, tables, chairs, lighting, acoustics, lunch and refreshments.



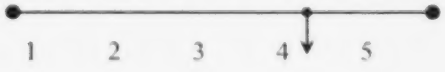
Mean Average: 4.12

6. **OUTCOMES:** Whether the session achieved the expected outcomes, and whether the session was worth the time and effort of the participants.



Mean Average: 4.31

7. **OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SESSION**



Mean Average: 4.40

Participants' Comments

What do you think would have improved the outcomes or the overall effectiveness of the session? What should be done differently next time?

- Four topics were too many to discuss. If it was cut down to one or two topics, we could have gotten into more in-depth discussion and possibly could have addressed "what could the Ministry do?" or "how could the Ministry address this?" type questions.
- Disappointed by lack of attendance by fellow CAOs.
- Good listeners!
- More municipalities in attendance. The Ministry should hear from all sizes, summer villages to cities.
- Keep it up. I would like to see these types of sessions continued.
- Suggestions that we gave would like to see outcomes.
- Larger participation.
- The idea of bringing these out of the region is great, a real change in thinking on the Ministry's part.
- The overall effectiveness of the sessions was excellent.
- Group size was good.
- There was good interaction.
- More counties or municipal districts present.
- More CAOs would help.
- Some information to us in advance in order to ensure more thorough thought process.
- Perhaps forwarding the survey results in advance and providing info on the intended topics for discussion would have generated additional thoughts and questions.
- More discussion time.
- There was a great deal of experience here today.
- There were many issues and suggestions discussed at the meeting – now it would be very rewarding to see at least some of them followed through.
- I would like a copy of the survey for reference.
- The open discussion was very important, don't restrict it.
- Possibly more regional.
- My only comment would be that the session had been held closer to our village. (2½ hours travel time each way).
- Session was excellent.
- Enough time for discussions – good.
- More locations around the province needed.
- And more participants (better advertisement targeted for smaller municipalities).
- Invitation could provide more information as to focus group make-up.
- The CAO survey could have been included in the letter of invitation. It would seem that not many had read it before coming to the meeting.
- More discussion the better from the floor.
- More attendees (but you may have no control over that).
- Perhaps more notice ahead that it was specific 'to small municipalities' but otherwise 'the group size' was great.
- Format was great and information was very beneficial.
- Group discussion covered a lot of areas.
- Better advertising.
- Maybe regional meetings so smaller communities less travel and time.

- Better participation might have been achieved by emphasizing that this meeting was for small communities only.
- I felt this was a very useful forum particularly when the attendees were all dealing with common issues.

Any thoughts or suggestions to pass on to department staff that you didn't bring up during the session?

- Very much appreciate the Ministry's interest in our world and wishing to help.
- No, a very good group interaction.
- Regional strategy planning.
- SWOT analysis with goals to deal with weaknesses.
- Mandatory attendance.
- It seems like we really don't know anyone in Municipal Affairs anymore; how do we improve that?
- Suggestions brought up during the session were representative of my concerns.
- More networking like this and having sessions on the things that all of us from village CAO experience.
- I think we presented you with enough challenges to start with.
- What has happened with regional development initiatives? We have heard very little.
- Call me – Tom Roberts should do a Roles and Responsibilities session with our Council and CAO.
- Staff department work excellent!!
- Advice and support from the Department is really appreciated.
- Promotion of your services especially to new CAOs should be encouraged.

Do you have any other comments?

- Keep doing these sessions.
- Very worthwhile session. Pleased that the Ministry has asked for input.
- Thank you.
- Sure think I ended up in a great job.
- Appreciate the efforts of Municipal Affairs to be more proactive.
- Good session.
- Very worthwhile. Good session. Nice to review ideas with others.
- Thanks for giving us this opportunity to share common concerns and to present some recommendations for the improvement of our services.
- A good session.
- I would prefer a room with windows.
- County of Newell should host (Regional Strategy Planning) and sponsor lunch and refreshments.
- Good session.
- The Ministry should encourage more regional cooperation and governance.
- Good exchange of ideas and information.
- Ideas to take away.
- Good to have small municipalities together.
- Great open discussion.
- I would like to see tangible results from the sessions.
- I hope that what we have talked about produces valuable initiatives.
- I have really enjoyed this session and am very glad to have a meeting with CAOs from other villages.

- This would be a good semi-annual project.
- Anything that facilitates networking with other similar size villages would be attended in future.
- Really enjoyed this.
- Very worthwhile exercise.
- I believe that this should occur on a regular basis.
- It was a non-threatening environment with your peers, which provided a good avenue for free thinking/talking – Thank you.
- Important items: Corporate review, Roles and Responsibilities mandatory pre-or-post election, Pension/Compensation Benefits, and Textbooks/Templates.
- Learned a lot – always important to listen to peers – good to know you're not alone.
- Appreciate knowing that the Ministry is willing to help – for municipality of 500 or 5,000
- Good service from the hotel staff.
- Good starting points – recognition of small communities as having varying needs as compared to larger communities will be valuable in providing resources/support to CAOs
- Session was worthwhile.
- Look forward to your next session.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Session was very well presented.
- Gave lots of opportunity to express our thoughts.
- Helps to validate money concerns, problems ideas – thanks.
- Excellent day, exchange of ideas was great.
- Our village really appreciated the special grant this spring and we hope it will continue.
- I am always pleased with the service provided by the staff at Municipal Affairs – my job over the years has been made easier because of your involvement – Thank you.

APPENDIX B: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

WELCOME

CAO Focus Group

June and October 2005

Background

- Active dialogue
- Keep current on issues
- Responsive to your needs
- Efficient Ministry programs and services

Purpose

- 2004 CAO survey highlights
- Explore issues raised in the results
- Opportunity for feedback
- Improve dialogue

Ministry Staff Roles

- Listen
- Facilitate dialogue
- Capture main points
- Bring back suggestions for consideration

Agenda

10:10 CAO Survey highlights

10:45 Questions/discussion on results

11:00 Break

11:05 Small group discussion in four themes

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Report back on morning discussions

1:30 Discussion on input and on future opportunities

2:25 Break

2:20 Discussion continues

2:50 Wrap up

Your Role

- Your ideas/ thoughts/ suggestions
- Your assistance and patience while we continue to build better relationships, programs and services

What's next??

- A report summarizing your ideas, thoughts, suggestions and shared with you and others
- Ministry will assess current practices, programs, and services
- May implement some short-term suggestions
- Longer term suggestions may require further exploration

Ipsos Reid

Ipsos

2003/04 CAO Survey Highlights

Survey Overview

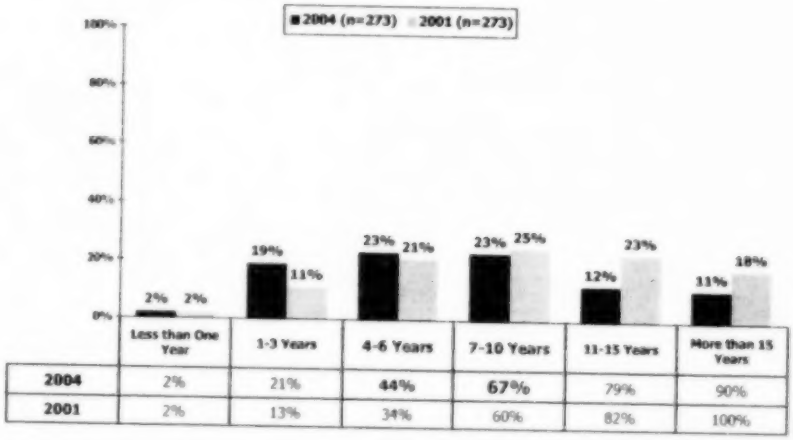
- Fall 2003, Ipsos-Reid contracted
- Developed in consultation with staff/associations
- Delivered electronically to CAOs
- Question areas included:
  - CAO employment, education and training
  - Succession planning
  - Municipal planning and priorities
  - Ministry programs and services
- 4 focus group sessions
- 85% Response rate

Survey Findings

Succession Planning

Anticipated CAO Duration (2001 vs. 2004)

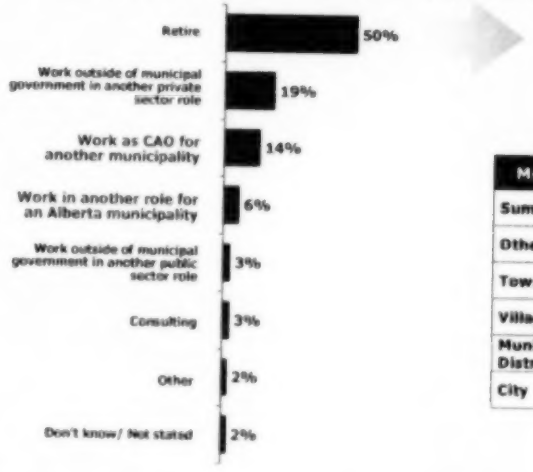
q2. How many more years do you anticipate working as a CAO in an Alberta municipality?



	Less than One Year	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-10 Years	11-15 Years	More than 15 Years
2004	2%	21%	44%	67%	79%	90%
2001	2%	13%	34%	60%	82%	100%

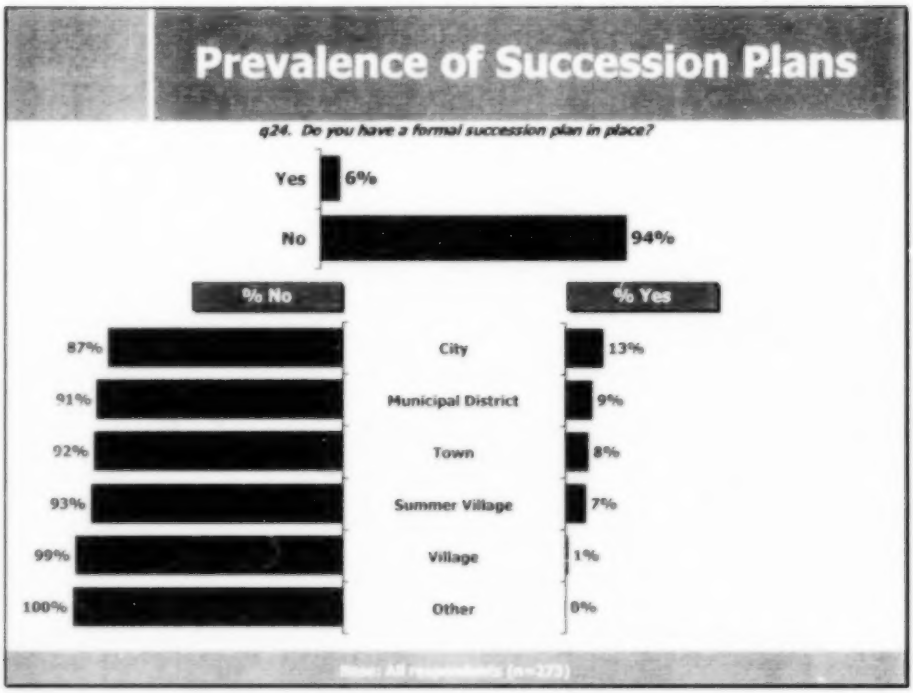
Future Plans

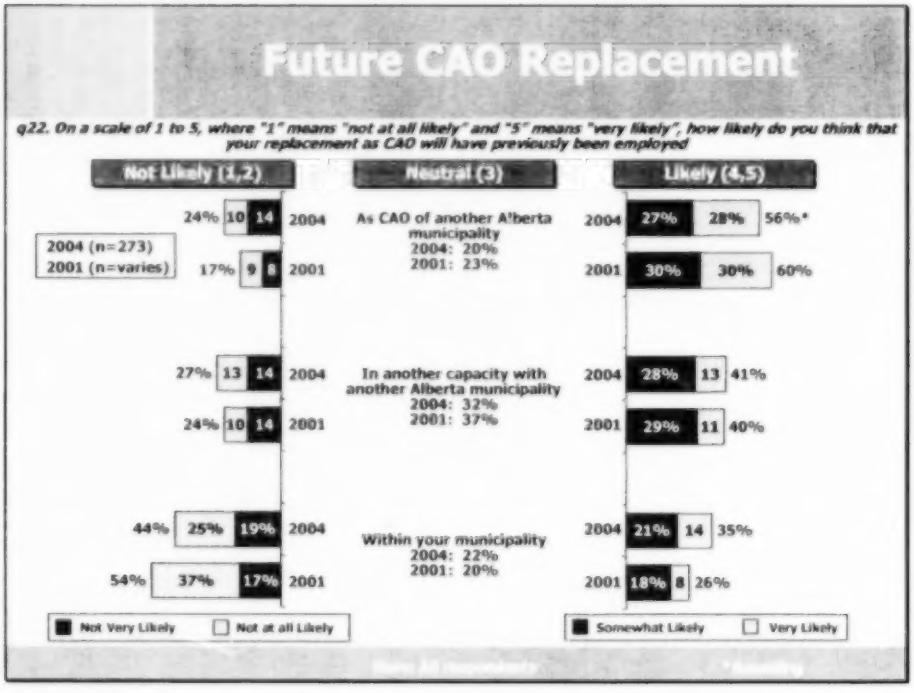
q3. And what do you intend to do following your employment as CAO with your present employer?

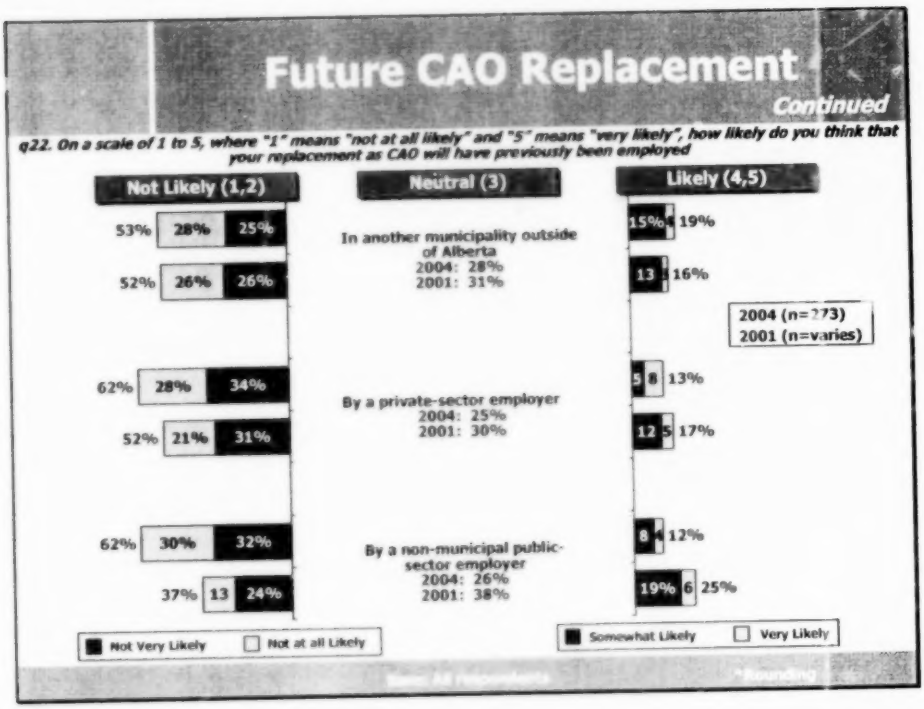

Retire 50%
Work outside of municipal government in another private sector role 19%
Work as CAO for another municipality 14%
Work in another role for an Alberta municipality 6%
Work outside of municipal government in another public sector role 3%
Consulting 3%
Other 2%
Don't know/ Not stated 2%

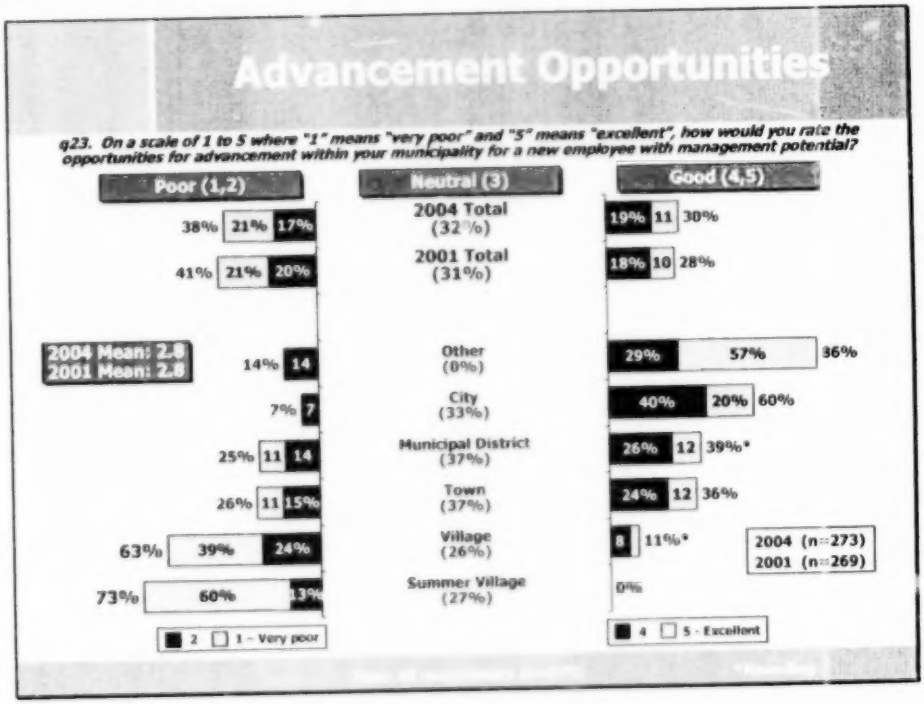
% Retiring by Municipality

Municipality	% Retiring
Summer Village	80%
Other	57%
Town	51%
Village	51%
Municipal District	47%
City	20%


Prevalence of Succession Plans
q24. Do you have a formal succession plan in place?
Yes 6%
No 94%
% No
% Yes
87% City 13%
91% Municipal District 9%
92% Town 8%
93% Summer Village 7%
99% Village 1%
100% Other 0%

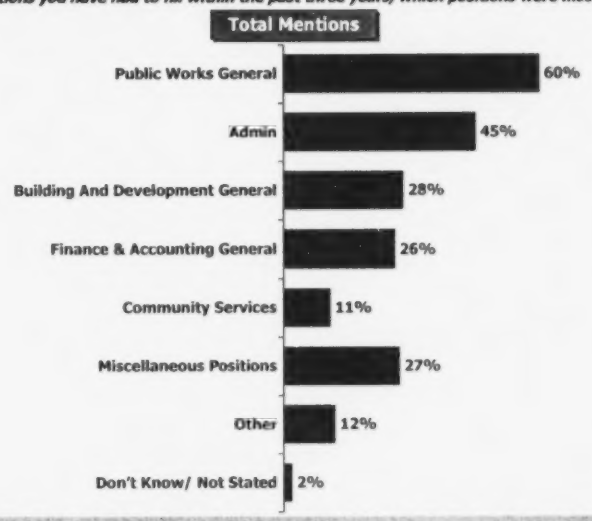

Future CAO Replacement
q22. On a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "not at all likely" and "5" means "very likely", how likely do you think that your replacement as CAO will have previously been employed
Not Likely (1,2)
Neutral (3)
Likely (4,5)
2004 (n=273)
2001 (n=varies)
As CAO of another Alberta municipality
2004: 20%
2001: 23%
In another capacity with another Alberta municipality
2004: 32%
2001: 37%
Within your municipality
2004: 22%
2001: 20%
Not Very Likely
Not at all Likely
Somewhat Likely
Very Likely


Future CAO Replacement
Continued
q22. On a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "not at all likely" and "5" means "very likely", how likely do you think that your replacement as CAO will have previously been employed
Not Likely (1,2)
Neutral (3)
Likely (4,5)
In another municipality outside of Alberta
2004: 28%
2001: 31%
By a private-sector employer
2004: 25%
2001: 30%
By a non-municipal public-sector employer
2004: 26%
2001: 38%
2004 (n=273)
2001 (n=varies)
Not Very Likely
Not at all Likely
Somewhat Likely
Very Likely


Advancement Opportunities
q23. On a scale of 1 to 5 where "1" means "very poor" and "5" means "excellent", how would you rate the opportunities for advancement within your municipality for a new employee with management potential?
Poor (1,2)
Neutral (3)
Good (4,5)
2004 Total (32%)
2001 Total (31%)
2004 Mean: 2.8
2001 Mean: 2.8
Other (0%)
City (33%)
Municipal District (37%)
Town (37%)
Village (26%)
Summer Village (27%)
2004 (n=273)
2001 (n=269)
2 1 - Very poor
4 5 - Excellent

Difficult Positions to Fill - Main Themes -

q25. Of the positions you have had to fill within the past three years, which positions were most difficult to fill?



Base: Provided most difficult position to fill (n=186)

Survey Findings – Conclusion

Succession Planning

- 54% of CAOs no longer in industry in 10 years
- Only 6% have succession plan
- 56% of CAOs believe replacement will be another CAO
- Not enough experienced CAOs for new positions
- Alberta is unprepared for exodus of trained CAOs
- Issue also includes other staff

Survey Findings

Training

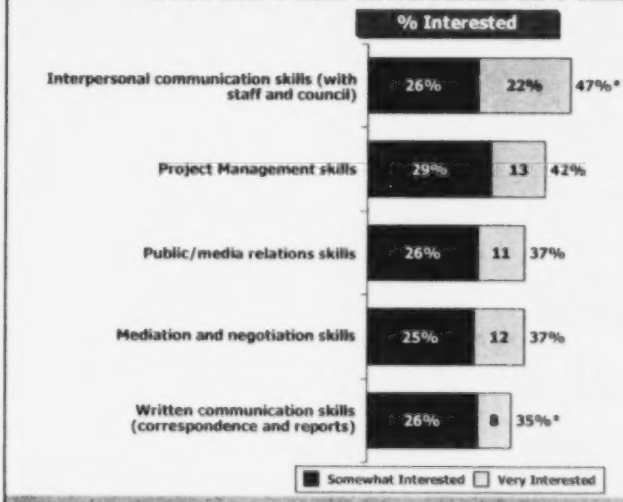
Training Interests

q9. Please indicate your organization's interest in each of the following potential areas of training by using the scale of 1 to 5 where "1" means "not at all interested" and "5" means "very interested".

Training Interests

Continued ..

q9. Please indicate your organization's interest in each of the following potential areas of training by using the scale of 1 to 5 where "1" means "not at all interested" and "5" means "very interested".



Base: All respondents (n=273) *Rounding

Survey Findings – Conclusion

CAO Training

- Key training needs:
  - **Strategic thinking and planning**
  - **By-law and policy drafting**
  - **Roles and responsibilities**
- CAOs access Ministry training
- AMA offers Roles and Responsibilities training
- Current training programs need more exposure

Inter-Municipal Relations

- Good relationships between CAOs
- Relatively weaker relations between CAOs own and neighbouring councils
- Strained urban/rural relationships respecting land use planning issues
- Some strained relationships between CAOs and their councils

Focus Group Report

Role of Municipal Affairs

- Become more involved with municipalities
- Market your services
- Advocate on behalf of municipalities
- Create bodies to address regional issues
- Expand your scope of advisory expertise
- Follow up with CAOs
- Promote the benefits of the public sector
- Dialogue

Focus Group Report

Survey Findings – Conclusion

"What we have done today has been very worthwhile. I hope Municipal Affairs can take to heart these comments and will come back to dialogue with us on these issues."

Further Information

Web Site Address:

http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ms/04MunAdminSurveys.cfm